

11/05/2007 This Week in Congress

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November 5, 2007

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." This weekend marked the opening weekend for pheasant season in Kansas. It was good to see the local restaurants and hotels filled with orange-clad sportsmen. Hunting is a significant contributor to the Kansas economy and very much a part of our way of life. I hope you find this newsletter useful.

From Capitol Hill to Bunker Hill: Beginning My Annual Listening Tour

Each year since coming to Congress, I travel more than 5,000 miles to visit communities in each of the 69 counties of the First Congressional District and hear about issues important to Kansans. I will begin my annual Big First Listening Tour next week.

My first two stops will be on Monday, November 12 in Inman in McPherson County and on Tuesday, November 13 in Salina in Saline County. [Click here](#) to view times and locations and to see the other nine stops that have been scheduled. The remainder will be determined based upon the 2008 schedule for Congress. Check my Web site to stay up-to-date on the tour schedule.

At the conclusion of this year's tour, I will have held 810 town hall meetings in hundreds of Kansas communities and learned something from thousands of Kansans. The issues I focus on and the work I do in Washington, D.C., are based on what I learn about in these conversations.

Visiting Kansas Guardsman at Walter Reed Army Medical Center

While in Washington, D.C., I visited Walter Reed Army Medical Center to visit with Staff Sergeant Jerrod Hays of Wellington. In February, Staff Sgt. Hays was seriously wounded by an improvised explosive device while serving in Iraq with Battery B, 1st Battalion, 161st Field Artillery of the Kansas National Guard. Battery B is based in Pratt. While undergoing treatment for his injuries at Walter Reed, he received a Purple Heart from President Bush. Staff Sgt. Hays, along with his mother Irmal, returned to Walter Reed this week for more treatment.

I thanked Staff Sgt. Hays for his service and great sacrifice for our country. His patriotism and spirit are an example for us all. I also appreciated learning about his experiences with the military health care system. Congress is currently considering legislation to improve military and veterans' health care for wounded warriors, including legislation I introduced to implement the recommendations of the Dole-Shalala Commission.

Supporting Funding for Breast Cancer Research

In recognition of October as National Breast Cancer Awareness Month, the House passed legislation this week that would allow the U.S. Postal Service to continue selling breast cancer awareness postage stamps. I am a sponsor of similar legislation that helps raise money for breast cancer research by giving consumers the choice of purchasing a special stamp for 14 cents above the normal price. This small amount of money adds up. Since 1997, the program has raised more than \$53 million for breast cancer research. More than 180,000 new cases of breast cancer are expected to be diagnosed in the U.S. this year. Every bit of additional funding helps as we continue searching for a cure to this disease.

Working to Preserve the Flag Folding Ceremony at National Veteran Cemeteries

I joined more than 100 members of the House this week in insisting that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) reverse its recent decision to ban a common flag-folding recitation used during military funeral services at the 125 national VA cemeteries. An important part of veterans' funerals, the U.S. flag can be folded 13 times in silence or the significance behind each fold can be recited. In response to a complaint about religious references included in the fold recitation, the VA instructed the recitation not be performed, even if requested by the family.

The folding of the flag is a solemn moment at a military funeral and for many families of veterans it has tremendous meaning. If a family wants the 13 steps recited, they should have that choice. Our veterans have rightfully earned this honor.

Speaking at the Kansas Conference on Hunger Issues

On Monday, I spoke at a conference of individuals, associations and agencies committed to fighting hunger in Kansas. The theme of the conference, "Imagine - There's No Hunger," is a great goal to work toward. Building partnerships and increasing collaboration was the purpose of bringing these groups together. I am confident these networks will go far in reducing hunger across Kansas. I appreciated the opportunity to share what we in the House Agriculture Committee have done to help equip these groups in combating hunger. Thank you to each of the individuals in attendance. It is this commitment that will keep kids from going to bed hungry.

Transportation Committee Finalizes Legislation to Repair Bridges

The Transportation and Infrastructure Committee considered several pieces of legislation this week and approved a measure to help address structurally deficient bridges that are a part of the national highway system. This bill was designed to address safety concerns that arose in the wake of the tragic I-35W bridge collapse in Minnesota in August that killed 13 people. The legislation increases safety and inspection requirements and authorizes additional money to repair bridges that need the most immediate attention. Earlier this year, I visited with Kansas Secretary of Transportation Deb Miller and was reassured that the state has placed an emphasis on fixing bridges in need of repair over the past several years.

Attention Given to Darfur in the House of Representatives

Also this week, the House passed a resolution I sponsored that calls on President Bush and the international community to take immediate steps in stopping acts of sexual violence against women and girls in the countries affected by the genocide in Darfur, Sudan. Along with this call to protect and care for the women and girls, the House condemned recent attacks on African Union peacekeepers and recognized the advocacy groups that have brought these atrocities to the American public's attention. I hope President Bush and my colleagues in Congress recognize that words alone will not end the death and destruction in Darfur. We must back up our words with a strong will that other countries can rally around. The world is looking to the U.S. to take the lead.

Agriculture Committee Hears about Food Safety Technologies in the Meat Industry

The House Agriculture Committee met this week to learn about technologies being implemented in the meat processing industry to ensure consumer safety. Witnesses included meat processing companies, university scientists and U.S. Department of Agriculture Food Safety Inspection Service Administrator Alfred Almanza. The Committee learned about technologies that allow companies to maximize freshness, minimize cross-contamination and minimize pathogen growth. This was an informative hearing and I appreciated hearing from the industry experts.

Sending Mail and Packages to Military Men and Women this Holiday Season

The U.S. Postal Service (USPS) released a list of recommended dates for sending military mail overseas so service men and women can receive letters and packages in time for Christmas. The mailing date for Parcel Post is November 13. For information about additional mailing dates for letters, cards and priority mail, visit the USPS Web site at www.usps.com/communications/newsroom/localnews/in/in_2007_1011.htm.

Talking to South Barber and Meade High School Students from Washington, D.C.

This week, I visited with students in James Johnston's government class at South Barber High School in Kiowa using video conference technology. Students asked me about a variety of issues, including the war in Iraq, children's health insurance and foreign policy. The students were also able to discuss immigration, agriculture and energy policy with my staff members, Mark Colwell of Hays and Tyler Lund of Salina.

Also this week, Meade High School government students in Ron Ryckman's class joined me using the same video conference technology to discuss my role in Congress. Students asked me about Social Security, gun control, the Iraq war and the 2008 presidential election. I was impressed with how well-informed both groups of students were about such a wide variety of issues.

Attending University of Kansas Homecoming Football Game

On Saturday, I was in Lawrence to watch Kansas play Nebraska for its homecoming game. While there, I visited with members of the KU Law Student Bar Association, the Dean of KU's Business School William Fuerst and the Dean of Engineering Stuart Bell. Though the focus of my visit was watching the football game, I did have the chance to visit with Chancellor Robert Hemenway about a number of higher education issues, including the university's desire to provide greater education opportunities to soldiers at Fort Leavenworth. It was an honor to also visit with Athletic Director Lew Perkins and basketball coach Bill Self. I was also able to see my old colleague and current interim Athletic Director of Nebraska Tom Osborne.

Discussing Current Issues with Associates at Wal-Mart in Salina

On my way home from Washington, D.C., I stopped in Salina to visit with associates at the Wal-Mart Supercenter. Associates commented and asked questions about health care, immigration, energy, welfare and other current issues. I would like to thank Store Manager Ken Noonan and Marketing and District Manager Mark Kaseforth for the invitation.

In the Office

Charles Hughes and Jim Murguia of Manhattan, Carolyn Smith of Wichita, Steve Wilkinson of Overland Park and Fred Lucky of Topeka were in with the Kansas Hospital Association to discuss the challenges of operating public hospitals. Keith Miller of Great Bend was in with Kansas Farm Bureau to visit. Kenneth Hiten of Augusta and Dave Fish and Rufus Forrest of Wichita also stopped by this week.

Several Kansans visited my office and toured the Capitol this week, including Scott and Peggy Friesen of Inman, Bill and Connie Maddy and Carissa Schnell of Stockton, Rob Channel and Dr. Kim Perez of Hays, Mark Fleury of Seneca and Amy Fleury of Topeka.

Contact Me

It is an honor to serve you in Washington, D.C. Please let me know how I can be of assistance. To send me an email, [click here](#). You can also [click here](#) to contact me through one of my Kansas offices or my Washington, D.C., office.

Very truly yours,

Jerry